Volume 3, Issue 10   Atari Online News, Etc.   March 9, 2001

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Atari Online News, Etc.
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A-ONE #0310   03/09/01

~ Napster Fans Awake!   ~ People Are Talking!   ~ Game Boy Advance!
~ Fashion Source Released ~ Atari Back In Fashion! ~ ’Naked Wife’ Virus!
~ Web AtariWriter Column! ~ Atari Book Online!   ~ ICANN Meetings Open!
~ March MyAtari Out!   ~ Mac Owners Most Loyal! ~ eBay Users Indicted!

-* EarthLink Promises Anonymity *-

-* Online Auctions To Net Fraud List! *-
-* Judge Orders Napster To Police Trading *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"

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Before I forget, I wanted to take a minute to thank all of you who were kind enough to send me a note offering condolences for the recent loss of my mother. You have no idea how much I appreciated that - thank you. I knew that I could count on a number of my Atari/A-ONE friends to offer various forms of support, and that occurred. What I didn't expect was the outpouring support from people I've never met, in person or online. The common ground was they are all Atari users or fans - the best folks around as far as I'm concerned! Things are still pretty crazy around here and in Maine, but we're all starting to get past this. Again, thank you all for your support during this rough period.

Anyone living in Pennsylvania, please do me a favor and track down that Puxatawney Phil the Groundhog, and kick him! Six more weeks of winter? Hah! Here in New England, we got buried in snow Monday and Tuesday! The local news reports said that we got 26 inches of snow here in my area! However, I don't think that we got quite that much in my neighborhood. Still, over a foot and a half of heavy wet snow was more than enough to break my back! Before next winter, I will be buying a snowblower; this shoveling is just too much for me these days! And now we're expecting another storm on Friday! And, as I'm putting the last minute touches on this week's issue tonight, the snow has begun and we've already got 3-4 inches on the ground already! It appears that we're not going to see signs of Spring for quite some time! My aching back!

Until next time...

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Fashion Source Released

Thomas Goirand, author of Fashion (the RSC editor that was planned to be shipped in Centek's developer's kit), has released all the source of his program. This includes a library for programming GEM using assembly language, a small desktop (what would have been called Rune: the Dolmen's desktop), an image viewer, etc.

http://zigo.anotherlight.com

MyAtari March Issue

MyAtari magazine’s March 2001 issue is now on the Web.

http://www.myatari.net

Atari Graphics and Arcade Game Design Book

The full text of the classic 1984 book "Atari Graphics and Arcade Game Design" is now available on the Web. The book covers BASIC and assembly language game programming.

http://www.atariarchives.org/agagd/

Chapter 1. Graphics Modes And Color Registers
Chapter 2. Display Lists
Chapter 3. Character Set Graphics
Chapter 4. Assembly Language Applied To Game Design
Chapter 5. Player-Missile Graphics
Chapter 6. Vertical Blank & Display List Interrupts
Chapter 7. Games That Scroll
Chapter 8. Raster Graphics & Sound
Chapter 9. Advanced Arcade Techniques
Chapter 10. Game Design Theory

Atariwriter Column On The Web

Two dozen classic articles about using AtariWriter and Atari word-processing in general are now available on the Web.

Carolyn’s Corner was a column about word-processing in general and AtariWriter Plus in particular, written by Carolyn Hoglin. It could have been subtitled "Secrets You Won’t Learn from the Manual." It was featured in the Mid-Florida Atari Computer Club’s newsletter from 1990-1992 and posted to CompuServe’s Atari Forum during the same period.

http://www.atariarchives.org/articles/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. There are a few things I’d like to talk about a little bit before we get to the stuff from the Newsgroup. Please indulge me as you usually do.

First, I'd like to to say just a few words about Dana's comments last week. I offered to take over the lion's share of last week's issue to give Dana time to take care of his personal business. I figured that I could put up with it for a week... especially since the lion's share of the work is his every other week. He felt that putting the issue together would at least give him something to do. Since my wife and I had to deal with the loss of her mother only a year ago, I recognized the truth in his viewpoint.

But that's not what I'm talking about. What I AM talking about is his appreciation of the offer. In my mind, it wasn't anything extraordinary, or even especially kind. It's just something that one friend does for another when there's a need. And thinking back over the past year, I was reminded of friends that had gone out of their way, even if just a little, to see if there was something they could do to help. I remember the appreciation that I felt for all of my friends for their concern. All of my "computer friends" like Dana and Rob, and 'the gang' from our weekly chats on Delphi... and of course I couldn't forget my buddy Ale, and all of our non-computer friends as well. Yes, it's good to have friends, but you never really realize how good it is until you need them. I've been lucky enough to have been blessed with fine friends, and I try not to forget that.

I hope that Dana knows that he's got friends too. I'm not pandering here, just stating something that we should all probably take stock of more often. Hang in there Dana. It does get easier bit by bit.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that the SETI@home TEAM ATARI search group is quickly approaching 39 years of CPU time contributed to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. If you happen to have a PC or Mac that you'd like to put to work for the cause, please feel free to join us. You can find out about SETI@home by visiting http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/ and you can join TEAM Atari at http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/cgi?cmd=team_lookup&name=team+atari

There are 43 of us at the moment, but I'd like to see a lot more. Atari users have always been the kind of folks who would go for this kind of stuff. SETI is a kind of rag-tag project that doesn't get the funding or support that it deserves, and is often laughed at by others in the community. Sound familiar? My only gripe is that there is no SETI@home client for Atari computers. We've been 'round and 'round about it, but the long and short of it is that the project just doesn't have the manpower to put out a version of the software for a relatively small number of machines that would take a lot longer to complete a unit of data than they really want to wait. Well, I guess you can't have everything.

The last thing I want to mention is this crazy weather. We're expecting another snow storm here in southern New England... think of me while you're reading this... it should be snowing here as you read this. It's been a crazy winter here. I just hope that the summer isn't as screwy. If it is, you'll hear me complaining about it, rest assured.

Okay, let's get on with the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Mickael Pointier asks about putting an FPU in his MegaSTE:

"I would like to know if any kind of 68881 or 68882 co processor can be plugged on a MegaSTE motherboard.

Someone proposes [to sell] me some of those chips, but I do not know if they are in the right "pin packaging" and if they are at the correct frequency.

The chips looks like ST’s MMU and GLUE chips but they have pins on the bottom side instead of on the borders. It looks like it needs something like old ZIF’s sockets for pentiums processors.

For the frequency, they range from 16 mhz to 25 mhz.

Could I risk something if I plug one of these chips ?
Some incompatibilities ? Things to setup ?"

Steve Sweet tells Mickael:

"Its not that simple, you also need a GAL chip that’s absent from the mother board in order to use an FPU. I’ve got one in my MegaSTE, I don’t wake it up often. You should sit down and think about why you’d need one."

Mark Bedingfield tells Steve:

"Because you can. I am on the lookout for that gal too, but Motorola no longer make FPU’s."

Djordje Vukovic adds:

"That GAL is in no way Motorola-related. AFAIK it performs address decoding and the starting address of a memory-mapped MC68881 FPU is computer-specific.

On an Atari it is $FFFA40 but on some other machine it may be completely different. However, knowing the pinout of the GAL socket in the MegaSTE, I suppose you may get someone to burn a compatible chip for you."

Chris Swinson asks about hardware hacking an ST to upgrade RAM:

"Does anyone know how (if possible) to hardwire a 72pin 4 meg SIMM into the stfm? I managed to do it with 4 30 pin simms (used the STe design and hardwired into the STFM) though all the address and data lines are correct, there seems to be a miss with the RAS lines, there seems to be 4 RAS lines on the simm but only 2 on the ST. On the St they are paried to 2 banks, thus 2 RAS lines, but with 1 simm it might cause a problem."

Andy Ball tells Chris:

"I’m not going to say it’s impossible, let’s just say it’s not likely to be straightforward. 30 pin SIMMs are 8 or 9 bits wide, but 72 pin SIMMs are 32 or 36 bits wide. Since the STFM has a 16-bit bus, it’s probably easier to use pairs of 30 pin SIMMs.

Joshua Kaijankoski looks for english resource files for MagiC:

"I’m a long time user of Magic 6.1 and I’ve installed it on several computers. The problem I’m having is trying to get the English resource files to work. Everything else works except for magxdesk.rsc. When magic loads up it gives two bombs and brings up a file selector to find magxdesk.app. It won’t go through. This happened on my TT030 and now on my MKII Falcon. Pretty annoying. Anyone have any ideas or experience on the matter?"

Steve Sweet tells Joshua:

"I take it that Magxdesk is OK with the original german resource?. If so, I’d obtain a replacement resource archive, i suspect yours is corrupted.

I obtained my Magxdesk resource from DDP, purveyors of finely translated software although I translated the binary myself.

If this doesn’t cure it I suggest you start looking elsewhere for problems.

You could try installing the demo of Jinnee, this will eliminate some possible problems, such as MAGX.RAM corruption, then you’ll want to buy it, as its the best desktop ever produced for the Atari system.

For the RSC, [try going] here.

http://www.cix.co.uk/~derryck/index.htm

Click on the "DDP" button at the top right, scroll down midway and its called ’MagxDesk 4.0’."

John Oakes asks for help:

"I would like some information about the software NoDESK, which was an alternative desktop."

Martin Byttebier tells John:

"As you see it’s an alternative desktop coming from no|Software Nodesk really exists. It is a very nice desktop which was far ahead its time. The only drawback is that it is pig to setup properly. One has to edit some *.cnf files by hand. Also it’s German only."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. I know that it’s kind of thin, but the recent snow must have buried some of the posts. <grin>

Please tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Game Boy Advance Ready To Go!

""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Xbox To Have Parental Controls?!
SpongeBob SquarePants! 'The Bouncer'!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!

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Nintendo Game Boy Set To Hit Stores

Nintendo Co. is out to prove that Mario doesn't need super-sophisticated computer graphics to sell.

Game Boy Advance, the revamped version of the Game Boy portable video game machine, will not have three-dimensional imagery but offers an extensive game lineup and a monitor display with thousands of vivid colors.

It is set to hit Japanese stores March 21 for $82 and U.S. stores for $99.95 on June 11.

Mario, the red-capped acrobatic plumber, jumps, runs and catches golden coins the same as ever on Game Boy Advance, shown to reporters Wednesday in Tokyo.

But the monitor can now show 32,000 colors, far more than the 56 of Game Boy Color, which came out in 1998. Nintendo has sold more than 100 million Game Boys since the video game came out in black-and-white 11 years ago.

The Kyoto-based company is anticipating demand for Game Boy Advance to start at 3 million, promising initial shipments of 1 million and planning sales of 24 million in the first year worldwide.

Compared to the latest offering from rival Sony Corp., PlayStation2, which delivers dazzling three-dimensional images with a powerful 128-bit processor, Game Boy Advance offers just the basics.

''Games aren't fun just because they are three-dimensional," Nintendo Vice President Atsushi Asada said. ''Depending on technological advances isn't enough to satisfy people."

Nintendo has come up with a game lineup of 25 titles, some from outside software makers, for the same date the machine goes on sale. That contrasts with PlayStation2, which has been a money-loser for Sony because of a dearth of games.

Creators say with game-machine technology growing so complex, it takes time and money to come up with good games.

The sale of Game Boy Advance was delayed twice - last summer and Christmas - giving Nintendo more time to prepared with plenty of games.

Besides the Game Boy Advance version of the Mario game, the $40 ''Super

Mario Advance," the offerings cover a whole range of game entertainment, including role-playing, car-racing, sports and action games.

The U.S. game lineup is still undecided, Nintendo said.

In one simulation game, ‘‘Napoleon," the player can pretend to be ordering troops through battles in snowy Europe and sandy Egypt, although the creators have taken ample liberties with history, throwing Joan of Arc and Nostradamus in the story line to add unexpected thrills.

Microsoft’s Heavily Hyped Xbox Gets Family Friendly

Amid the considerable buzz over Microsoft’s highly anticipated Xbox, few have taken notice of the unglamorous announcement that Microsoft will solder a V-chip-style control inside the video game console, which is slated for introduction this fall. Details about the device won’t be unveiled until the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the annual gaming industry powwow in May, but it will probably allow parents to prevent their kids from playing games rated for violent or sexual content. With the threat of regulation of the games industry continuing to percolate on Capitol Hill, Microsoft’s move is not just preemptive, it’s historic. The industry voluntarily rates its own games, but this will be the first time a company has wired such controls directly into the hardware.

Representatives from Nintendo, Sega and Sony would not comment on Microsoft’s plan, but Arthur Pober, executive director of the industry’s Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), approves of the move. "We have always advocated giving parents more information about the products," Pober says. "What’s interesting about Microsoft’s plan is that it also shows that this is clearly no longer just a children’s game." As the percentage of adult game consumers continues to climb, Microsoft is betting that it will be more profitable to censor gamers than games.

Indeed, according to the Interactive Digital Software Association, 58 percent of console game consumers are over 18 years old. Nevertheless, under pressure from critics like Senators Joseph Lieberman and John McCain, developers have adopted their own self-regulatory measures, including the ESRB, which puts detailed labels and advisories on games and in advertising. Since 1994, the ESRB’s team of 100 raters -- which includes housewives and retired schoolteachers -- evaluates all of the console games and about three-fourths of the PC games released each year.

And to the consternation of kids everywhere, the ratings given to video games tend to be stricter than those given to movies. For example, an R-rated movie might feature drug use and sexual situations. If the same material appeared in a game, it would be rated AO (Adults Only) -- the gaming equivalent of NC-17. To help educate parents, the ESRB plans to begin the second in a series of broadcast public-service announcements, featuring such squeaky-clean celebrities as Tiger Woods.

U.S. gamers already get imported games sanitized for American consumption. Nintendo has stringent guidelines as to what can appear in its games. Similarly, Capcom’s gory Resident Evil for PlayStation was toned down for U.S. release. Instead of shooting regular humans, gamers shoot zombies; green blood is substituted for red.

But making such adjustments is time-consuming for developers. Not surprisingly, many are pleased by news of Microsoft’s parental controls. "Turning humans into robots or zombies (for the sake of a family version) is a pain in the ass," says Cliff Bleszinski, lead designer for Epic, whose game Unreal Tournament features a "low-gore" option. Billy Pigeon, an analyst for Jupiter Research in New York, expects gamers to have mixed reactions to the Xbox controls. "I’m sure at least a portion of them will try to hack it," he says. But thus far, rabid fans see parental controls as the lesser of two evils. Posts a gamer named Hi C on a popular online forum called Shugashack: "At least the arbitrariness is imposed from within instead of by the government."

THQ Releases SpongeBob SquarePants: Legend of the Lost Spatula For Game Boy Color

Nickelodeon, the #1 kids’ network and THQ Inc., the #1 kids’ videogame publisher announced the release of the first interactive SpongeBob SquarePants adventure, SpongeBob SquarePants: Legend of the Lost Spatula for Game Boy Color. Based on Nickelodeon’s chart-topping animated television show, SpongeBob SquarePants: Legend of the Lost Spatula is now available at major retail outlets nationwide.

‘‘SpongeBob SquarePants is currently the #2 property on all Kids TV with more than 28 million viewers each month," stated Peter Dille, vice president of marketing, THQ. ‘‘We couldn’t have chosen a better time to introduce the first of our interactive SpongeBob SquarePants adventures. The retail community is very excited about this release."

‘‘THQ and Nickelodeon’s most recent Game Boy Color release, Rugrats in Paris, currently ranks among the top five Game Boy Color titles at retail," stated Steve Youngwood, Vice President Interactive Products and Publishing, Nickelodeon Consumer Products. ‘‘We look forward to that same level of success with SpongeBob SquarePants: Legend of the Lost Spatula for Game Boy Color."

In SpongeBob SquarePants: Legend of the Lost Spatula, players travel through Bikini Bottom as the bubbly, off-beat SpongeBob, on a quest to become the greatest fry cook of all time. SpongeBob must find hidden clues, unlock secret levels, feed hungry ghosts and avoid jellyfish as he searches for the Flying Dutchman’s Golden Spatula, the key to fry cook success. SpongeBob is joined by Sandy Cheeks, Squidward, Mr. Krabs and, his very best friend, Patrick Star in this under water Game Boy Color adventure.

Square Ships The Bouncer for the Playstation 2

Square Electronic Arts announced the release of The Bouncer for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system. The Bouncer combines fast-paced fighting action with SQUARESOFT’s trademark story-telling skills.

‘‘The Bouncer is a unique game in that it incorporates a significant amount of action, fighting and some role playing elements," said Jun Iwasaki, president of Square Electronic Arts. ‘‘We believe that consumers are eager for a fresh, innovative gaming experience and that The Bouncer will deliver the level of excitement that they are seeking. Fully voiceovered characters combined with the heart-pounding fighting action and branching storylines will make The Bouncer a ‘must have’ for PlayStation 2 owners."

Helping to bring the dramatic story to life are the high-resolution graphics and fully-utilized voiceovers. Both features are made possible by the PlayStation 2 system’s powerful graphic capabilities and new DVD format, enhancing a dramatic plot by bringing characters to life using details such as subtle facial expressions and almost touchable tattoos. For the voiceovers and dialogue, players can choose from either English or Japanese, both of which can be switched during the course of the game. Further adding to the drama, cut scenes are rendered in real-time allowing for seamless transition in and out of gameplay. The Bouncer is the first PlayStation 2 game to be released with Dolby Digital 5.1 sound. ‘‘Our commitment to giving gamers the best and most realistic gaming experience led us to use Dolby Digital 5.1 sound for The Bouncer," said Takashi Tokita, Director, The Bouncer, Square Co., Ltd. ‘‘Dolby Digital draws the player right into the action with the sounds of the colossal aircraft engine, gigantic explosions and ambient street life."

The story begins at a bar called Fate as a bouncer named Sion, is beginning his days shift. An otherwise routine morning is suddenly interrupted by a violent assault by masked assailants. Unable to stop the intruders, Sion watches as they capture his friend Dominique and flee the scene with her in their clutches. The action then moves to new heights as Sion and two of his fellow Fate bouncers set out to save their friend. Throughout the game, players can earn ‘‘Bouncer Points" which allow them to purchase new techniques or increase life, attack and defense power. The three playable bouncers have their own fighting style and can learn up to seven or eight unique extra skills.

Featuring spectacular water, fire and lighting effects, the 3D environments in the game allow the bouncers to fight enemies every step of the way. Their travels take them through a variety of scenes from dark underground subways to outer space. As they get closer to finding Dominique, the bouncers begin to uncover the diabolical master plan of their shadowy adversaries. Their quest suddenly becomes a race against time, as they try to save their friend and stop a madman from destroying the world.

The Bouncer features three different game modes, Story Mode (story-driven single player mode); Versus Mode (last man standing wins - up to four players can participate by utilizing the PlayStation 2 multitap); and Survival Mode (single player mode in which you continually battle waves of enemies - points at the end of battle are saved as rankings). In addition to more than a dozen characters offered in the game, players can customize and develop characters in the Story Mode and save them to a memory card for future battles against friends’ characters in Versus Mode.

‘‘The Bouncer brings more than just fierce punches and kicks - it features an engaging story and plenty of gameplay modes that offer a high replay value. Hands down, this is one of the best PS2 games." --- GamePro, April 2001 issue

‘‘...This game looks stunning, with vibrant colors and heavy use of the system’s soft-focus effects. The characters -created by Tetsuya Nomura, the artist behind Final Fantasy VII and VIII- really pop to life with facial expressions and little details like flowing hair." --- EGM, March 2001 issue

‘‘This is the first PS2 fighting game to incorporate pressure-sensitive attacks... (tap the button for a weak jab, squeeze it for a hard punch), and the first to reward players with experience points... you really couldn’t ask for a better looking game..." --- Game Informer, February 2001 issue

‘‘(The Bouncer)...is certainly one of the best-looking PlayStation 2 games to date, and its branching plot structure should give you a reason to play through it more than a few times." --- PS2.IGN.com

The Bouncer is compatible with the DUALSHOCK2 analog controller and carries a suggested retail price of U.S. $50. The game carries an ESRB rating of ‘‘T" (Teen).

High Heat Major League Baseball 2002 Ships for PlayStation

The 3DO Company announced the release of the High Heat Major League Baseball 2002 game for the PlayStation game console. High Heat features excellent fast-paced, true to life gameplay and was recently called ‘‘the best baseball game for the PlayStation" by Official PlayStation Magazine. The High Heat franchise is known for realistic batter-pitcher match-ups, authentic recreations of all 30 MLB stadiums, superior artificial intelligence, and multiple difficulty settings that are tuned for the novice and hard core gamer alike. For the first time in the series’ history, the High Heat game will be available for five different gaming platforms including the PlayStation2 and PC (shipping in March), Game Boy Color (shipping in May), and Game Boy Advance (shipping in June).

All-Star Vladimir Guerrero of the Montreal Expos and his brother, Wilton, of the Cincinnati Reds, true fans of the High Heat series, will endorse this year’s edition. Interestingly, 3DO discovered last year that the Guerrero brothers were actually using High Heat (for PlayStation) not only for fun, but also as a training tool to scout opposing MLB pitchers (Sports Illustrated, May 1, 2000).

Interactive Imagination Shakes Up the Gaming World With Release Of Magi-Nation for Nintendo GameBoy Color

Interactive Imagination, a Seattle-based developer of Collectible Card Games (CCG), video games, books, and animation, announced the shipment of their premiere game, Magi-Nation, for Nintendo’s GameBoy Color platform. Priced at $29.99, Magi-Nation hits store shelves nationwide including Kay Bee Toys, Toys ‘‘R" Us, Target and Electronics Boutique.

‘‘We are thrilled to take the leap into the video gaming industry with such a quality product" said Phillip Tavel, senior vice president of Interactive Imagination and the creator of Magi-Nation. ‘‘The introduction of the GameBoy Color game marks the first of many steps in expanding our Magi-Nation franchise into the realms of total entertainment."

Magi-Nation is a role-playing game (RPG) based on Interactive Imagination’s popular Collectible Card Game Magi-Nation Duel, introduced to players last fall. Players step into the shoes of Tony Jones, an everyday boy lost in the magical world of Magi-Nation. Adventuring through wondrous levels of forests, caverns, castles and more, young Tony interacts with local denizens and learns that Magi-Nation is threatened by the Shadow Magi ... and that he may be destined to save this world. Tony must become a Magi himself and do battle with the Shadow Magi, summoning and dueling fantastical dream creatures.

Sony Computer Entertainment America Approves Five New 3DO Games

The 3DO Company announced that four new games for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system have been approved by Sony Computer Entertainment America and are now in manufacture for release in March 2001. 3DO has now finished six games for the PlayStation 2; World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks and AquaAqua are currently in stores.

The Warriors of Might and Magic game infuses the award-winning Might and Magic brand with intense hand-to-hand combat, a new intuitive gameplay interface, awe-inspiring lighting and special effects, and an innovative new fighting system. The game will receive a Gold Award in the April issue of PSE2 magazine. The Warriors of Might and Magic game is expected to ship on March 20.

The High Heat Major League Baseball 2002 game brings the perfect balance of beauty and brains to the PlayStation 2. The High Heat series was recently named one of the ‘‘Top 10 Games of All Time" by Computer Gaming World magazine. According to Game Informer magazine, ‘‘If 3DO can in fact accomplish its goal of achieving the most realistic gameplay to date, High Heat should be a shoo-in as the PlayStation 2 MVP." The game is expected to ship March 27.

The Army Men Green Rogue game brings intense shooter action to the best-selling Army Men brand. The bio-engineered Omega Soldier crashes behind enemy lines and must battle for his very survival. Says PSE2 magazine, ‘‘In short, Green Rogue is fast, good looking, deep and fun." The game is expected to ship on March 20.

The boys are back and ready to take on the Tan menace in the Army Men Sarge’s Heroes 2 game. Sarge and Vikki team up against Plastro and spy Brigitte Bleu in 17 missions across never-before-seen locations including a toy store and inside a pinball machine. ‘‘ ... absolutely phenomenal visual details: beautiful reflections, stellar lighting effects, and super-crazy explosions," says GamePro magazine. The game is expected to ship on March 21.

In the Army Men Air Attack game, the heroic Captain Blade and his Alpha Wolf Squadron take on an onslaught of new missions, improved helicopter physics, and more game play than ever before. With twenty missions fought over ten unique environments, each battlefield is a visual playground. ‘‘Never before has the Army Men series enjoyed such a level of visual perfection," says GameSpot. The game is expected to ship on March 27.

Video Game Poll Says Online Gaming Is Next Frontier

Online multiplayer gaming is the next frontier for video games, according to conclusions from a recent gaming poll conducted by market research and consulting firm PC Data.

The poll of about 3,500 people, conducted by e-mail, detailed game playing habits by gender and age.

While some of the results were rather intuitive, such as men’s greater penchant for fighting games, the study also unearthed some surprises, according to Roger Lanctot, senior director of research.

The sample had a large proportion of videogame players as just 4 percent had not played any games in the prior three months. Some 29 percent of those polled had played multiplayer online games.

‘‘For both PCs and consoles, online gaming is the new frontier. Opportunities are still in their earliest phases," he said at The Global Gaming Forum held in Los Angeles.

Not surprising, he said, was the most popular game cited by those surveyed -- Solitaire.

Women tended to be the biggest fans of word games and gambling, while men prefer combat, flying, driving and world-creating strategy games. Older players used their personal computers more, while younger gamers played more on consoles.

Of the gamers polled, the largest group -- 41 percent -- play a typical one to five hours a week. Some 24 percent play for less than an hour, while 5 percent play more than 20 hours per week.

Youngest gamers, largely male, tend to dominate what he called ‘‘hard-core" gamer categories, but older retirement-aged players also spent considerable hours playing games.

The poll indicated that video game console shoppers value graphics, available titles, DVD playing capabilities and price.

‘‘These results would seem to justify the decision to include DVD playing in many of the new consoles, and not Internet connections," Lanctot said. Sega’s discontinued Dreamcast included an Internet connection, while Sony’s PlayStation 2 did not, for example.

He acknowledged that the data ignored children 13 years old and younger and was skewed to emphasis online usage, because those polled received the survey by e-mail.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

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Atari Video Games Back in Fashion

John Sheppard could never bring himself to get rid of the old Atari console his parents gave him when he was five.

Packed in a box, the Atari 2600 moved from attics to basements for more than 20 years along with the owner’s favorite game, ‘‘Frogger."

Last year, Sheppard decided to wipe off the dust and hook up the old machine in the family log cabin. He figured it would be fun to play with his wife and kids on rainy days.

‘‘I cleaned it up, found all the necessary wires, connected everything, placed Frogger in the console and turned it on," says Sheppard, the 36-year-old president of a Toronto-based technology company. ‘‘Three hours later, we were all hooked once again."

In an age of ever crisper, more realistic graphics, some older video game fans are nevertheless looking back with zest to the platform of their youth, craving to get a shot at Space Invaders, Ms. Pac Man or Pole Position.

Considered the grandfather of video consoles, the Atari is making something of a 21st century comeback. Maybe it’s the rudimentary joysticks (remember the orange fire button?), or the black plastic cover and fake wood-grained trim.

The comeback is spurred by emulation software, which allows Atari games to be played on most of the latest operating systems, from the rise of online gaming and from a perhaps unexpected quarter - the coming wireless market.

Video gaming companies think Atari games’ basic graphics and small memory demands could make the brand a major player on wireless handhelds.

Banking on a legendary logo, Atari T-shirts are hot in trendy clothes stores. And thousands of video gamers are browsing retro Web sites these days to download or buy revamped Atari games.

‘‘In the ’80s, everybody had an Atari," says John Hardie of Valley Stream, N.Y., an Atari collector and gaming expo organizer. ‘‘You wouldn’t even say: ’Do you wanna play video games?’ but ’Do you wanna play Atari?"’

Atari’s odyssey began in 1972 when two engineers, Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney founded Atari Inc., named after a term from the Japanese game Go.

It was the first company to turn arcade games into a living-room phenomenon, marketing consoles attached to a TV set. Atari was also the first to introduce on-screen scoring, two-player action and gaming cartridges.

The Atari 2600 soon became the most popular home video gaming system worldwide, but mismanagement, overproduction, lack of quality control and competition ended the Atari saga in the early ’90s.

‘‘The company was passed like a football and broken into pieces," says Carl Goodman, curator of the American Museum of the Moving Image, which exhibits old Atari consoles and arcades. ‘‘But nothing was able to destroy and dampen the sense of nostalgia people had. Atari games are like mute, black-and-white movies."

Today, years after the company went bankrupt, buried its cartridges and sold its licenses, many Atari titles can be found on free Web sites.

Out of a total of 75 million online players, roughly 5 million play old classic games at game networks, estimates Sean Wargo, an analyst at PC data.

Other video game companies are also exploiting the interest for classic games by reformatting some of their old titles for PCs or modern consoles.

Launched in 1998 for PCs, a revamped version of ‘‘Frogger" - a little frog lost in strange world forced to navigate numerous obstacles to get home - has sold 6 million copies so far, while ‘‘Frogger 2" launched last fall is already approaching the one million mark, says John Hurlbut, senior vice president of Infogrames Interactive Inc. which owns Atari licenses.

Infogrames even set up an ‘‘Atari Lab" to find ways to translate Atari titles onto platforms like cellphones and PDAs.

‘‘Pong on my Palm would be great because it’s simple, easy and people love to play with these games: Atari is a sort of a fast food in the game genre," says Hurlbut.

Up to 5,000 Atari items are regularly auctioned online. Many fans also end up at O’Shea Ltd., a Kansas City, Mo.-based wholesaler that owns the world’s largest inventory of Atari cartridges.

In 1991, when Atari Corp. liquidated its inventory, company CEO Bill Houlehan purchased around 2.3 million cartridges in mint condition. Today, more than one million games are stored in a limestone mine 300 feet underground.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Napster Fans Not Napping Yet

Though Napster announced last Friday that it would implement screening software designed to block copyrighted material over the weekend, its users were still downloading songs as of Monday morning without any filtering.

The new software is supposed to winnow out an estimated 1 million-plus copyright-protected music files by stopping searches based on the file’s name. According to Napster, the program is intelligent enough to prevent users from circumventing it, either by intentional (or unintentional) misspelling or by renaming a given file.

However, more than 11,000 people exchanged approximately 2.2 million files on just one of the scores of Napster servers on Sunday evening alone.

And, hunts for Billboard’s top 10 songs proved successful throughout the weekend, as did searches for songs by such anti-Napsterites as Dr. Dre and Metallica.

After a court hearing on Friday, U.S. District Court Judge Marilyn Hill Patel told news sources: "The matter is submitted, and I will issue some kind of preliminary injunction."

But Patel declined to indicate when exactly she would issue her revised order.

Meanwhile, Napster attorney David Boies failed to provide a specific time during the weekend when Napster would put into operation the new screening software. Early reports had said it would installed by Saturday.

Napster, however, provided a disclaimer on its Web site, noting that development and implementation of the filtering program would not be easy.

"It is a complex technological solution that is very taxing to the system and will degrade the operation of the service," said Napster on its Web site, adding that attempting to differentiate between copyrighted and non-copyrighted material is a difficult task.

In anticipation of Patel’s expected ruling, Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) president Hilary Rosen said in a prepared statement issued Friday: "We are grateful for the Court’s diligent efforts to fashion an appropriate injunction and look forward to an order which makes clear that the infringing part of Napster’s business -- taking music which isn’t theirs and giving it away -- must come to an end."

On Sunday, RIAA spokesperson Amy Weiss told a news source that her organization had no immediate comment on Napster’s execution of its file-blocking program "or lack thereof."

But according to another news source, a Napster spokesperson confirmed that the company has in fact begun implementation of the new software. While music from such pop stars as Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez were still freely available, songs from Metallica and such classic rock giants as Jimi Hendrix had dropped off significantly.

Hoping to squeak out a few more tunes before the new filtering system goes into effect, Napster users were still downloading feverishly as of Monday morning.

One 36-year-old executive who is a fervent Napster user told NewsFactor Network that he was awake most of Sunday night downloading nearly 100 songs.

"Most of them were guilty pleasures from my childhood," said the executive. "I mean really, where else am I going to find such gems as [Rex Smith’s] ’You Take My Breath Away’ or Kristy and Jimmy MacNichols’ version of ’Da Doo Run Run’?"

Court Gives Napster 72 Hours To Block Songs

In a preliminary injunction issued late Monday night, Chief Judge Marilyn Hall Patel of the U.S. District Court, Northern District of California, ordered Napster to block access within three business days to songs that record companies claim are being downloaded in violation of copyright law.

The ruling, dreaded by Napster’s global legion of free-music fans, has been eagerly awaited by many in the recording industry, particularly the major labels belonging to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

In a brief press release, RIAA president and CEO Hilary Rosen said: "We are gratified the District Court acted so promptly in issuing its injunction requiring Napster to remove infringing works from its system. We intend to provide the notifications prescribed by the Court expeditiously, and look forward to the end of Napster’s infringing activity."

The injunction acknowledges the difficulty involved in trying to track all copyrighted songs being traded at any given time. But according to the ruling: "This difficulty, however, does not relieve Napster of its duty" to block copyrighted recordings.

The court ruling states that rather than monitoring all files being traded on a continuous basis, it is sufficient to do periodic searches from time to time "against lists of copyrighted recordings provided by the plaintiffs" -- the major record labels.

In an Endnote, the ruling admits that "given the limited time an infringing file may appear on the system and the individual user’s ability to name her files, [blocking each and every] ’specific infringing file’ would be illusory."

This appears to be at least a tacit acknowledgement that Napster cannot be held responsible for its users’ endless creativity in circumventing any type of blocking.

Once Napster receives "reasonable notice" from a record label that copyrighted songs are on the system, the song-swapper has three business days to prevent access to the offending files, even if the files have not yet been included in Napster’s index.

However, Napster is also obligated to act if it is "reasonable to believe that a file available on the Napster system is a variation of a particular work or file," which means that in addition to formal file names, Napster must also seek out user-inspired variations, perhaps even including coded names.

The company must also file a Report of Compliance within five days of being notified of an infringement.

Judge Patel’s preliminary injunction also provides that record companies may notify Napster of song titles in advance of their release, requiring Napster to block the songs before they are ever traded.

According to the ruling, "the burden is far less and the equities are more fair to require Napster to block the transmission of these works in advance of their release. To order otherwise would allow Napster users a free ride -."

It remains to be seen how interested Napster loyalists will be if Napster does indeed end the free musical ride. The company has proposed a paid subscription service, but alternatives such as Gnutella may become the downloading vehicle of choice for song-swappers.

And, while the recording industry seems to have won this battle, according to some analysts it may turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory. Electronic music downloads are clearly the wave of the future, they say, and the music industry’s "victory" may turn out to be the last-gasp defense of an outmoded music distribution model.

Judge Orders Napster to Police Trading

A federal judge has ordered Napster to prevent users from trading unauthorized files within the next two business days.

A federal judge has ordered Napster to curb the exchange of copyrighted music on its Internet service, a ruling that threatens to cripple the company and to undermine the activities of millions of people who flock to Napster each day to freely copy songs.

The judge’s injunction, issued late Monday and published today by the court on its Web site, requires Napster to prevent users from trading unauthorized files within three business days of receiving notice from aggrieved copyright holders. Napster had previously said such an injunction could force it to shut down altogether, but the company issued a short statement today saying it would seek to comply with the terms, presumably while remaining in business.

Still, the order, which takes effect immediately, appears to signal the end of an era for Napster. The five major record companies, which sued Napster asserting the company abets copyright infringement, have said they hold the copyrights to as much as 70 percent of the work traded on the online service.

"Napster’s going to be much different," said Eric Scheirer, an industry analyst with Forrester Research, a market research firm. "You’re not going to be able to find the stuff you find at the record store."

But the injunction, issued by Judge Marilyn Patel of the United States District Court in San Francisco, also places a burden on the record companies. The ruling requires the record companies not only to provide the names of songs to which it owns the copyrights, but also to find evidence those songs are being traded on Napster. The companies have previously asserted that this requirement places an unfair burden on them.

Still, the record companies embraced the injunction today as providing much-awaited relief. They said they would seek to comply promptly with the requirement that they give Napster lists of songs to which they own the copyrights, but declined to say how many songs this would entail.

Anticipating the ruling, users of Napster have flocked to the site in recent months, exchanging millions of files each day. The company, started two years ago by a 19-year- old college student, said it had around 65 million registered users, of whom 10 million use the service each day, and as many as 2 million at any given time.

Napster users also have taken other steps to preserve the ability to trade music. Some users are testing other services that, unlike Napster, do not have centralized servers and will be more difficult for record companies to police. Other Napster users are seeking to skirt the bans by modifying the way they name songs on the service; for instance, if Napster seeks to block exchange of the song "Fade to Black" by Metallica, Napster users may modify the name to "Fade 2 Black" to evade a filter.

Such efforts have helped Napster users in part evade a filter that Napster unilaterally put in place starting Sunday night, a block aimed at preventing users from searching for songs by Metallica and Dr. Dre. Mr. Scheirer said that even if some users sought to evade the filters, the injunction was "likely to become effective against most Napster users."

Judge Patel’s ruling modifies an injunction originally ordered in July of 2000, when she found that Napster had been used for the wholesale infringement of copyrighted works. Two days after her ruling, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit stayed Judge Patel’s injunction. Then last month, a three-judge panel from the Ninth Circuit issued a ruling supporting much of the legal reasoning behind Judge Patel’s original order, but requiring her to narrow the scope of her injunction.

As required by the Ninth Circuit opinion, the modified injunction issued Monday requires Napster and the record companies to share the burden in identifying copyrighted works exchanged by Napster users. The injunction also requires both the record companies and Napster to seek to identify variations of song names, like deliberate misspellings used by Napster users to evade the filters.

In a hearing held Friday to discuss the scope of the injunction, the record companies had asked Judge Patel to include in an injunction a provision allowing them to provide Napster with a list of songs before their release in record stores. In a heated exchange between the litigants, the record companies argued Napster should have to filter songs pre-emptively, while Napster asserted that the requirement would be an undue burden and that it should not be required to filter a song until it first was exchanged by users.

On this matter, Judge Patel’s ruling left some room for interpretation, according to legal experts. Judge Patel wrote that the record companies may provide Napster with a list of songs before their release. She then went on to say that Napster must block access "beginning with the first infringing file."

But a few sentences later, Judge Patel wrote that Napster must block "transmission of these works in advance of their release."

"To order otherwise," Judge Patel wrote, "would allow Napster users a free ride for the length of time it would take plaintiffs to identify a specific infringing file and Napster to screen the work."

Mark F. Radcliffe, an intellectual- property lawyer with the law firm Gray Cary Ware & Freidenrich in Palo Alto, Calif., said that it "is difficult to tell what she means" about the prerelease, adding, "It is fair to say this requires some thinking on the part of Napster as to what its obligations are."

On the whole, Mr. Radcliffe said the ruling was "a pretty big loss for Napster." He said the decision gave the company very little wiggle room to continue to be used as a forum for the free exchange of copyrighted works, absent permission of the copyright owners.

Hank Barry, the chief executive of Napster, is seeking to turn Napster into a for-pay service and has sought to make deals with record labels to provide them some proceeds from the business in exchange for rights to license their music. Already, Napster has struck one agreement with Bertelsmann’s BMG, one of the five major record companies, but the others have resisted, saying Mr. Barry’s offer of $1 billion in payments over five years is a paltry sum.

In a statement, Mr. Barry said Napster would comply with the court’s order, adding, "As we receive notice from copyright holders as required by the court, we will take every step within the limits of our system to exclude their copyrighted material from being shared."

The Internet has called into question whether basic tenets of copyright law might be shaken by the ease with which works can now be distributed. But Mr. Radcliffe said today’s ruling "indicates to Internet service providers, Web sites and other third parties on the Internet that put up content that there are no special rules for the Internet."

New Virus Uses Pornographic Bait-And-Switch

A new e-mail virus that promises an eyeful to Internet users but instead cripples Microsoft Windows emerged Tuesday, although anti-virus software companies said they had come up with a cure by mid-afternoon.

This destructive worm appears as a forwarded e-mail with "Naked Wife" in the Subject line. Readers who click on the attached file, called ‘‘Naked Wife.exe", will not get a nude picture, but will instead see a short cartoon followed by a vulgar message, signed by ‘‘BGK (Bill Gates Killer)."

All the while, the virus is deleting key Windows and system files on the user’s PC, rendering the computer unable to start up properly, according to Susan Orbuch, a spokeswoman for anti- virus software maker, Trend Micro Inc.

Similar to earlier worm-type viruses like Love Letter and Melissa, NakedWife can spread quickly by e-mailing itself to everyone in a user’s Microsoft Outlook e-mail address book.

At least 25 corporations have been infected so far, according to McAfee, a division of security software maker, Network Associates Inc.

Users who receive the e-mail should not click on the attachment and delete it immediately. The virus, written in the Visual Basic language, deletes files ending in .bmp, .com, .dll, .exe and .ini in the Windows and Windows Systems directories.

Infected users will not be able to restart their computers and will have to reinstall the Windows operating system.

eBay Scam Artists Face Criminal Charges

Federal prosecutors issued an indictment on Friday against three eBay users for self-bidding on their own art auctions in an attempt to spike bid prices.

The indictment alleges that the three men used 40 different names on eBay to place over 50 false bids on paintings they auctioned online from November 1998 to June 2000, including a fake Richard Diebenkorn painting that garnered a US$135,000 bid.

Rob Chesnut, eBay’s deputy general counsel, told the Associated Press that he believed the indictment marks the first criminal case to result from alleged shill bidding online.

eBay spokesperson Kevin Pursglove told the E-Commerce Times that the Web auction house assisted the investigation by providing federal authorities with access to eBay tools that can help pursue individuals who perpetrate auction fraud.

"Anytime we see a series of listings that may be a fraud, we will often contact the authorities and let them know what kinds of information we have available," Pursglove said. "A lot of the information we have is confidential and covered by our privacy policy, but we make it very clear to our users that if they engage in any fraudulent activities we will cooperate with the authorities to the max."

According to published reports, Kenneth A. Walton, a 33-year-old lawyer from Sacramento, California; Kenneth Fetterman, a 33-year-old man from Placerville, California; and 31-year-old Scott Beach of Lakewood, Colorado were charged with a total of 16 counts of wire and mail fraud.

If convicted, the men face up to five years in prison, as well as fines and the obligation to pay restitution to the victims.

The shilling scheme, which included the creation of phony e-mail accounts from art experts, raised $450,000 in auction bids. In May 2000, eBay voided the $135,805 sale of the fake Diebenkorn painting after discovering that Walton had placed his own bid on the item using a different online identity.

Pursglove said that because approximately 6 million items are listed on eBay each day, it would be impossible to catch each and every fraudulent action as it occurs. However, eBay’s new proprietary software tools gives the online auction leader the best possible chance to do so, Pursglove said.

The software searches the bidding history of individual bidders to look for historical shill patterns, and identifies shill patterns as they are occurring, Pursglove said.

On March 5th, eBay announced a new partnership with Eppraisals.com, the largest online art, antiques and collectibles appraisal company.

For a fee of around $15, eBay users can get an appraisal on an object up for bid by sending Eppraisals the object’s item number or URL. Pursglove said Eppraisals will help eBay customers determine if an item is priced or described accurately, with a turnaround time of around 48 hours.

Pursglove said that eBay’s alliance with Eppraisals "will go a long ways towards building confidence shoppers have on our site."

Online Auctions Top FBI Net Fraud List

Despite widespread consumer fears about online credit card fraud, the No. 1 scam on the Internet is Web auction fraud, according to a report released Tuesday by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National White Collar Crime Center.

Internet auction fraud was the problem in 64 percent of the complaints filed with the government’s Internet Fraud Complaint Center. Credit card and debit card fraud counted for just under 5 percent of the complaints.

"Victims of crime, whether it be Internet fraud or other crimes, are using the Internet as a reporting tool," FBI Director Louis J. Freeh said. "Now critical investigative information can be shared with our law enforcement colleagues around the country in a readily retrievable way."

The FBI report, which looked at complaints logged by the Center from May to November 2000, said that the total dollar loss for all complaints exceeded US$12.3 million.

During its first six months of operation, the Center logged 20,014 complaints and referred 6,087 to law enforcement agencies around the country for future action. Of those, 5,273 involved online auction fraud.

The average dollar amount of Internet fraud cases referred to law enforcement was $255 and the total dollar amount of all Internet fraud cases was $4.6 million over the six month period. The largest dollar loss reported was $366,248.

"E-business is no longer just a buzzword," said Texas state securities commissioner Denise Voigt Crawford, board member of the National White Collar Crime Center. "It’s here to stay and we must find ways to help consumers and businesses have confidence in the transaction technology they choose."

Notably, over 17 percent of referred cases involved losses of $1,000 or more. The FBI also said that nearly one-third of all losses were under $100 and two-thirds of complainants lost under $500.

Another common complaint came from people who ordered and paid for merchandise online, but did not receive what they ordered. Twenty-two percent of the complaints fell into that category.

While investment fraud was the problem for just over 1 percent of the fraud victims, those bilked by phony investments scams lost the most money, posting an average loss of $500.

The FBI reported that California was the hot spot for Internet fraud, with most of the con artists -- and most of the victims -- being from the state.

The Internet Fraud Complaint Center found that 17.3 percent of individual perpetrators and 19.8 percent of business perpetrators were operating in California. Likewise, 15.4 percent of individual complainants and 15.8 percent of business complainants also hailed from the Golden State.

Other states with high concentrations of dot-con artists and victims were Florida and New York.

The report found that the typical victim reporting a complaint "tends to be a male, in his mid-30s, residing in one of the more populated U.S. states, and was involved in a fraudulent online auction transaction that resulted in a loss of over $200."

However, the Internet Fraud Complaint Center stressed: "It is important to note that anyone is susceptible to falling prey to an Internet fraud."

The Internet Fraud Complaint Center is not the first agency to list auction fraud as the No. 1 online consumer complaint. In October, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission said that auction fraud topped the list of complaints received through its Consumer Sentinel database.

Additionally, in January, eMarketer released a report showing that auction fraud accounts for 87 percent of all online crime.

ICANN Meetings Open in Massachusetts

The agency that oversees Internet addresses, appointed by the U.S. government in 1998, admits it still hasn’t figured out how best to serve the millions of Web surfers affected by its policies.

Structural changes are among the agenda items as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers begins quarterly meetings Friday in Melbourne, Australia.

Much of the dissent comes from ICANN’s decision last year to hold elections for only five of the nine at-large seats set aside for the general Internet community.

A study on the future of at-large seats is pending, with one option to scrap them completely.

‘‘If these at-large seats are eliminated, there will be no democratic voice," said Barbara Simons, an unsuccessful at-large candidate who led a discussion on ICANN at a computer conference in Cambridge on Wednesday.

Eric Grimm, an Internet lawyer in Ann Arbor, Mich., complained that key decisions were being rushed through without adequate input from Net users.

In addition to structural changes, ICANN board members will review the recent selection of new domain names, the use of non-English characters and proposed changes to a contract for running ".com," ".net" and ".org" databases.

The board will also continue persuading other countries to recognize ICANN’s authority and to contribute the equivalent of membership fees.

In some ways, ICANN is in a bind. The Internet community demands action in Internet time, but that approach leads to complaints that ICANN perhaps acts too hastily.

‘‘In an ideal world, we would set aside a year or two where we just work on structure," ICANN chief policy officer Andrew McLaughlin said in a phone interview.

‘‘But the Internet is evolving," he added. ‘‘The market demands a responsive administrative organization. We have no choice but to go ahead with major decisions as best we can."

Case in point: November’s decision to select seven new domain names to relieve the crowded field of addresses ending in ".com."

A cloud remains over the recent selections because of perceptions that ICANN rushed through the process and did so without input from any of the elected board members, who were seated minutes after the selections were finalized. ICANN chairman Vinton Cerf has acknowledged that he wants to address procedural flaws which occurred during that process.

‘‘I realize there are kinks to be worked out, but that’s not an excuse for treating this as an experimental process that doesn’t have consequences," said Peter Schalestock, attorney for Group One Registry Inc., the unsuccessful bidder of ".one."

At-large board member Karl Auerbach, elected last year on an anti-ICANN platform, said selections could have been ‘‘vastly different" with the input of elected representatives.

ICANN has its defenders, including companies victorious in their bids for new domain names.

Brian O’Shaughnessy of VeriSign Inc., which joined in a winning bid for ".info," said ICANN can never reach a final form.

‘‘Times change. Technologies change. Institutions and society change," he said.

Also on the agenda in Melbourne is a proposal to restructure ICANN’s Domain Name Supporting Organization, a committee to make recommendations on domain name policy.

Jonathan Weinberg, a Wayne State University professor, said the committee is ‘‘badly in need of reform," but he’s not sure bad structure is solely to blame.

‘‘It’s mostly an excuse," Weinberg said. ‘‘ICANN likes to stress it’s a work in progress. That’s the way of deflecting criticism whenever anyone says anything bad."

EarthLink Promises "Anonymous" Web Surfing

EarthLink is mining privacy paranoia in a bid to sign up new subscribers, a move that could add new heat to marketing battles in the bitterly competitive Internet access business.

"They are watching you," the Internet service provider asserts in a TV spot that began running last week. "Compiling your information. Invading your privacy. At EarthLink, we would never do that. We just provide the totally anonymous Internet."

The ad campaign, by TBWA Chiat/Day, underscores growing consumer concern about prying online marketers--fears that have become mainstream enough to be turned into a marketing opportunity itself. EarthLink rivals including AOL Time Warner’s America Online have long advertised their privacy features as a way to attract new customers. Regardless of whether such ads can resolve the question of who protects consumers best, they could bring greater scrutiny to the privacy policies of ISPs.

"The ISP is the absolute gateway for consumers to get onto the Internet. They’re in the position to see virtually everything that a consumer does; very often these privacy policies don’t make that clear," said Ray Everett-Church, an attorney who runs privacy consultancy Privacyclue.com.

At least one Internet analyst said EarthLink may have gone too far in touting its service as "anonymous" in its bid to compete in a tough market.

"It sounds like EarthLink is grasping at straws," said Bruce Kasrel, a senior analyst at Forrester Research, who pointed to the difficulty in standing out among the thousands of ISPs. The company faces tough competition in various realms, such as price and offerings, he said, which is a disadvantage when rivals can provide portal deals or free services.

"It’s not really a solid promise to say that they’re going to protect your privacy when all they’re really protecting is stuff like names and addresses that can be gotten a million other ways," said Kasrel. Consumers understand their privacy is lost with these services, he said.

Nevertheless, privacy experts say companies that disclose their practices within their privacy policies are legitimate. Most of the major ISPs have reasonable privacy policies that reassure consumers that they’re not doing anything untoward with their customer data. Even many free ISPs, such as Juno Online Services, where consumers enter a quid pro quo agreement to give up their personal information in exchange for a subsidized service, are explicit about what they share with third parties and why.

"The reality is, like EarthLink, we do not give out consumer individual subscriber information to anyone," said Charles Ardai, chief executive of Juno, which runs a free and a paid service.

For its part, AOL said it has created "a gold standard for Internet privacy" and will continue to do so.

Still, some ISPs are forging extremely close relationships with marketers, which might make some consumers uncomfortable. The pliability of some Net access providers has encouraged several companies, such as Predictive Networks and Idealab-backed Compete.com, to collect and analyze consumer data via ISPs to market targeted promotions to Web visitors.

Predictive Networks, used in low-cost Net connections from ATT they kind of roll over and show you their belly. That’s a big concern," said Privacyclue.com’s Everett-Church, pointing to so-called John Doe suits in which plaintiffs pressure ISPs to get the names and addresses of the accused.

Although EarthLink doesn’t immediately roll over--it gives subscribers notice of a civil suit and gives them 10 days to contest it--privacy advocates said there are other remedies that would go further in helping consumers.

"The best thing that companies can do (to protect consumer privacy) is not record information in the case of these John Doe lawsuits. It’s possible just not to record data, because then it would be hard to trace it back to consumers," said Richard Smith, chief technology officer for the Denver-based Privacy Foundation.

On this point, EarthLink says it knows when a subscriber logs on or off the network but not where that person travels online. Furthermore, the company said it only keeps such data for 30 days. "In the event of a large (criminal) case, we would be able to give that information over," said Steve Dougherty, director of systems vendor management for EarthLink.

Despite shortfalls, privacy advocates say ISPs can take steps to protect consumers’ privacy.

ISPs can block a subscriber’s IP address, making it nearly impossible to detect a subscriber’s location, which can be tracked for targeted advertising or other purposes.

AOL, for example, issues IP addresses that make it look like most subscribers are from the same point in Virginia, its headquarters. EarthLink, on the other hand, says that its IP addresses are "obscured" because they are issued from a large pool of addresses, although they can be pinpointed to the city level.

Another privacy concern for some ISP customers involves a vulnerability in Windows that can expose a consumer’s disk drive to anyone on the Internet. The disk-sharing function uses certain ports, and ISPs can block all traffic to these ports so that their subscribers are protected.

EarthLink doesn’t block ports "because there are valid uses for them," said Dougherty. Uses for them include file sharing for an in-house printer, he said.

Although ISPs are increasingly touting their privacy features in general, consumers are largely clueless when it comes to details because of the complexity of standard privacy policies.

"These disclosures are buried in the user agreements, and even if consumers read through the five or 10 pages, it still may not sink in," Privacyclue.com’s Everett-Church said.

Survey: Macintosh Owners Still Most Loyal

Apple customers are still the most loyal to their brand, according to a new survey by Harris Interactive, the Internet-based research firm. The survey included over 140,000 Internet users, including more than 6,500 who purchased a home personal computer in the first three quarters of 2000.

The study found wide disparity in repurchase loyalty -- the percent of brand owners that bought the same brand when they purchased a new home computer -- among the top computer brands. For example, just over half (53 percent) of Mac owners who bought a personal computer in the first three-quarters of 2000 repurchased a Mac.

Gateway’s customer loyalty was highest among Wintel brands with a 45 percent repurchase rate. IBM had the lowest repurchase loyalty among the top brands, with only 9 percent. Dell had 40 percent, Hewlett Packard had 33 percent, and Compaq had 29 percent.

"As the consumer PC market matures, repurchase loyalty is a key measure for PC brands," said Dave Tremblay, director of technology research for Harris Interactive. "First time buyers account for only about one-fifth of all consumer personal computer purchases. While strength in that segment is a bonus, you can’t build a business relying on these buyers. The easiest buyers to capture should be a brand’s current users."

If a company can’t successfully sell to its own customers, it will likely have problems selling to its competitors’ customers, he added. IBM is a good example of this, according to Tremblay. When IBM de-emphasized its traditional retail consumer distribution channels, its customers abandoned the brand. Fewer than one in ten IBM brand PC owners repurchased an IBM brand PC.

"While strong repurchase loyalty is not enough (witness Apple’s high loyalty but declining share), it is a very good place to start," Tremblay said.

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